

Discussions With Vietnamese Leaders

Q. [*Inaudible*]*—*being very diplomatic in handling the question of human rights, religious, and other democratic freedoms in Vietnam. But Hanoi's sensitivity to this question is all too obvious. Did you make any headway in your talk with Secretary General Le Kha Phieu or Prime Minister Phan Van Khai on this front. Or, do you think the U.S. could work with Vietnam on this matter in a more open fashion?

The President. I had very open conversations with all of them, with the Prime Minister, with the secretary general, and the President. And what I believe is that once they realize that we're not trying to tell Vietnam how to run every aspect of their lives and that we feel that we're going to be in a friendly relation, we have to be honest about our disagreements, and we have to say what we think human rights and religious rights and individual freedom have meant to our country.

I think we will be in a dialog there, and I think that, plus the process of economic and social change which is going on in Vietnam will lead the country in a positive direction. That's what I believe. I think it will be very important for my successor to continue that dialog. I don't think we can drop human rights or religious freedom from our concerns anywhere in the world.

Q. Can we ask you just one last quick question

The President. Sure.

Musicians in Vietnam

Q. Did you have a chance to play your saxophone while you were there?

The President. No. [*Laughter*] But I love the music. I did—however, I heard a Vietnamese saxophone player at the entertainment after the state dinner, and he was really, really good. All the musicians were great. I was very impressed by the musical performances that were done after the state dinner.

Q. You wouldn't allow us maybe just—

Press Secretary Siewert. No, I think we have to wrap-up. Sorry.

The President. We're in Alaska, and we have to get back on the plane to go home. I'm sorry. Thank you.

Q. Thank you, Mr. President

The President. Goodbye.

NOTE: The interview began at 6:20 p.m. and was taped for later broadcast. The President spoke via telephone from Elmendorf Air Force Base, Alaska. In his remarks, he referred to Le Kha Phieu, secretary general, Central Committee, Vietnamese Communist Party; and Prime Minister Phan Van Khai and President Tran Duc Luong of Vietnam. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on November 20. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Statement on the Death of Charles F.C. Ruff

November 20, 2000

Hillary and I were deeply saddened to learn of the death of Charles F.C. Ruff, who served as my White House Counsel from 1997 to 1999. All of us at the White House admired Chuck for the power of his advocacy, the wisdom of his judgment, and the strength of his leadership. We loved him for his generous spirit and his keen wit, which he used to find humor in even the most challenging circumstances.

Chuck had an extraordinary and distinguished career in private practice with Covington & Burling, and in public service as Special Prosecutor, Acting Deputy Attorney General, and United States Attorney and Corporation Counsel for the District of Columbia. We will miss his counsel and friendship deeply.

Hillary and I extend our condolences to his wife Sue, his daughters Carin and Christy, and his mother Margaret.

Statement on the Department of Housing and Urban Development's 2020 Management Reform Plan

November 20, 2000

The Department of Housing and Urban Development's 2020 Management Reform Plan has changed the way that HUD does business for good. That's the verdict from a report issued today by the Public Strategies Group, a leader of the "reinventing Government" movement. The confirmed success of Secretary Cuomo's management reforms is

great news for HUD, the administration, and most importantly, the millions of Americans served by HUD's programs.

When we first took office, Al Gore and I promised the American people that we would improve the way our Government serves them. We had no greater challenge than HUD, which was mired in bureaucracy and which Congress had targeted for elimination. That was then, but this is now. Today, we have a Department that has turned itself around and, as this report clearly states, can serve as a role model for all Federal agencies.

I want to congratulate Secretary Cuomo, his team at HUD, and all of the Department's 9,000 employees for this significant achievement. I have no doubt it will serve as a milestone in HUD's history and foreshadow the kind of service that the Department will offer the American people in the years to come.

Statement on Labor Department Regulations on Private Health Care Plans

November 20, 2000

Today I am pleased to announce that the Labor Department is issuing final regulations requiring private health plans covering 130 million Americans to provide a fast and fair internal appeals process for patients when coverage has been denied or delayed. Under this new rule, for the first time, health plans would be required to make coverage decisions quickly—within 72 hours for urgent requests—and to provide consumers with meaningful information on their rights and benefits. Currently, many health plans do not have the medical expertise to make such decisions, and approval of necessary services can take as long as 300 days.

Under the strong leadership of Secretary Herman, we are taking an important step towards providing Americans the health care protections they need. It is the final executive action I can take to provide critical protections to patients in private health plans. It builds on my administration's previous action to provide critical patient protections to the 85 million Americans in Federal health plans. But the only way to give every American in

every health plan the right to see a specialist, to go to the nearest emergency room—not the cheapest—and to hold health care plans accountable when they cause harm, is to pass a real, enforceable Patients' Bill of Rights. Whether it is this year or next year, Congress should come together to pass this long overdue legislation.

Statement on the Death of Lars-Erik Nelson

November 21, 2000

Hillary and I are deeply saddened to learn of the death of Lars-Erik Nelson, one of New York's most distinctive voices and one of America's leading journalists. He was a fearless, independent, no nonsense reporter and columnist who believed in getting to the heart of a story and getting it right.

Lars-Erik Nelson distinguished himself as a foreign correspondent and as a skilled Russian translator, but his real gift was translating complex stories about our democracy for the American people. He did it with humor and a dogged pursuit for the truth. As his friends knew, beneath his gruff exterior was a gentle spirit and a warm heart. Hillary and I will miss him and the unique insight that he shared with New York and the entire Nation. Our thoughts and prayers are with his wife, Mary, and his entire family.

Remarks at the Thanksgiving Turkey Presentation Ceremony

November 22, 2000

The President. I want to thank Secretary Glickman and National Turkey Federation Chairman Jerry Jerome and President Stuart Proctor for being here. And I want to welcome the young people who are here, especially those who are from the Boys and Girls Club of Greater Washington.

[At this point, there was a noise from the far end of the Rose Garden.]

The President. I am—what's all that noise up there? *[Laughter]* What is it? It sounds like another turkey about to fly down here. *[Laughter]*